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ABSTRACT

St. Louis Community College (SLCC), in Missouri, is currently involved in various programs designed to address the issues of drop-outs, teenage pregnancy, illiteracy, crime, underemployment, and unemployment. One such program is the Emerson Electric Co. Minority Engineering Scholarships which since 1988 has provided scholarships to 80 minority students to take 2 years of engineering classes at SLCC and the remaining 2 at the University of Missouri at Rolla. SLCC also offer tech prep programs in chemical technology, allied health, information systems, and engineering. The college's William J. Harrison Northside Education Center offers credit and non-credit classes in a depressed, high-crime area, while the Center for Business, Industry and Labor offers customized training services and employee skills assessment to nearly 150 companies and more than 40,000 workers each year. Other programs include the following; (1) Basic Education, Job Skills and Work Experience, providing free clerical training and paid work experience to prepare low-income, unemployed St. Louis residents for entry-level jobs; (2) a worker Re-Entry program, which has placed 85% of more than 3,000 laid-off workers in new jobs; (3) the Education Coalition for Urban Families, offering literacy training; (4) the National Oak Park Exchange Congress, promoting racial cooperation; (5) math workshops for primary and secondary educators; and (6) a math and science program for girls in grades 8-10, emphasizing career opportunities for women. (KP)

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The American Community College: Essential to the American Dream

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AACC Forum

"The American Community College: Essential to the American Dream"

(Response to Robert McCabe)

Gwendolyn W. Stephenson, Chancellor

St. Louis Community College

April 24, 1995

Good Morning! It is a great privilege to be in such good company this morning and share the podium with Bob McCabe. If you have not yet read Bob's excellent call to action entitled "Starving the Solution," I highly recommend it. While it deals specifically with public funding in Florida, many of you will see your states mirrored in the information he presents. I strongly believe that not since the tremendous growth of community colleges in the early 'sixties have we had such compelling reasons to work together, share ideas and solutions, and present consistent arguments for public support at both the federal and state levels.

For those of us who have been working in community colleges for twenty or more years, the situations Bob describes and we all experience in our communities are initially extremely disheartening. Let's face it: At one time, we believed that if we could just build the campuses, open extension centers, expand our curricula, give students broad access to financial aid and academic assistance--in short, open all the doors--we could have

a tremendous impact on the development of our local communities and our society in general. We could make the American dream a reality.

The reality we must face in 1995 near the turn of the century is the classic good news/bad news scenario: The good news...We did and do have a positive impact. The bad news...It's not nearly enough. In St. Louis, we enroll more than 100,000 credit and non-credit students each year, 40,000 of whom are employees we train for local companies. We are delighted with these numbers, but we know it's not enough. When we look at high school drop-out rates, teenage pregnancy rates, illiteracy rates, crime rates, underemployment rates, unemployment rates and welfare rates, we know it's not enough. The core challenge for community colleges in the twenty-first century is defining, funding and accomplishing what is enough.

This morning, I will briefly share with you some of the programs St. Louis Community College is currently involved in to address these issues. Like your institutions, St. Louis Community College occupies a unique place in the area's educational community. We are midway in the public education continuum that extends from pre-school to postgraduate programs and lifelong learning opportunities. We are in a position to understand the problems and potential of education at all levels and to cooperate in programs to help improve the performance of

students of all ages.

Some of our programs may be similar to yours, and I hope we will have time at the end of this session or later to share success stories and ideas. (Personally, I would be most grateful if you have any suggestions on how St. Louis can generate as much excitement--and money--for education as it has for moving the Rams from Los Angeles to St. Louis!)

In the past year, the college has supported two initiatives which are driving expanded commitment and programming in our community. First is our strategic planning effort, due for conclusion in the fall, which will undergird both our accreditation process and our institutional direction for the next decade; second is a rededication to community outreach, through which we intend to greatly expand direct experience with the college among our many constituencies.

Central to each initiative is the development of the college's first statement of vision. We envision that, through our students, the college can make the St. Louis metropolitan area the very best place to live and work in the twenty-first century. This vision is at once simple and complex. We are asking ourselves questions such as:

- Why shouldn't our community's high school drop-out rate be the lowest in the country?

- Why shouldn't our crime rate be the lowest in the country?
- Why shouldn't our literacy rate be the highest?
- Why shouldn't our city be the least likely place for teenagers to become parents?
- And, why shouldn't St. Louis Community College be the first place people think of when they want to address these issues?

Of course, it would be self-defeating hubris to believe that the college can do all this alone. As all of you have no doubt discovered, the operative work for community colleges in the next century is *partnerships*. How we lead, form, initiate and develop partnerships is, I believe, what will determine our success in recreating the American dream.

The sample programs I will briefly describe to you this morning all reflect the partnership concept:

- *Emerson Electric Co. Minority Engineering Scholarship*

Sponsored in conjunction with Emerson Electric Company and the University of Missouri at Rolla, the scholarship is designed to increase minority enrollment in engineering. Recipients take the first two years of their engineering studies at the college, then transfer to UM-Rolla to complete the remaining two years. Since the program started in 1988: 80 students have enrolled; seven have graduated from UMR; two completed the pre-engineering

program at the college and decided to begin employment; 22 are currently in the program's pipeline; 12 are currently at Rolla; and six are expected to start at UMR next fall. This completion rate compares favorably with a national retention rate in engineering of 35 percent. (Ninety percent of our regular engineering transfers graduate from UMR.) Currently, we are developing a new scholarship program with Monsanto Company and the St. Louis College of Pharmacy.

• *Tech Prep*

Seventeen high schools in the St. Louis area--serving two-thirds of the public high school-age population--offer our Tech Prep "2-plus-2" programs. Initially funded by a three-year $350,000 grant from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the program provides a sequential, four-year course of study that blends traditional college-prep education with technical training. Participants earn an associate's degree upon completion of the program. Chemical Technology, Allied Health, Information Systems and Engineering are among the programs offered. The program is in its third year, and additional funding has been approved.

• *William J. Harrison Northside Education Center*

The college's Northside Center, located in an economically-

depressed, high-crime area of the city, opened last summer in a renovated former branch of the St. Louis Public Library. The center, which offers credit and non-credit classes in microcomputer applications, small business, literacy and high school equivalency, is rapidly becoming the hub of a number of cooperative programs with local churches, businesses and community centers.

• *Cornerstone Project/ Center for Business, Industry and Labor*

The Center for Business, Industry and Labor offers customized training services and employee skills assessment to nearly 150 companies and more than 40,000 workers each year. More than 100 training projects were completed last year with companies such as Anheuser-Busch, McDonnell Douglas and Trans World Airlines. The Cornerstone Project is a joint venture with St. Louis County and the Rankin Technical Institute to use a former electric plant for job readiness and training programs. The college will provide programs in basic skills and work readiness. St. Louis County owns the abandoned plant, and partners are seeking funds for program development.

• *BJW*

The Basic Education, Job Skills and Work Experience project provides free clerical training and paid work experience to

prepare low-income, unemployed St. Louis City residents for entry-level jobs. Participants also are given day care services, supplies, food allowance, placement assistance and tuition. The program is funded through the City of St. Louis.

• *Worker Re-Entry*

The Worker Re-Entry program is funded through JTPA and has contracts with both St. Louis City and County. Begun in the early 'eighties as the Metropolitan Re-Employment Project, this program has served more than 3,000 persons caught in lay-offs since 1990. Nearly 85 percent of Worker Re-Entry participants have been placed in new jobs. The program offers job search skills and placement classes plus retraining options through college programs. A State of Missouri Unemployment Security Office is located on site.

• *Education Coalition for Urban Families (Urban Families College Bound)*

The college is a partner in the Urban Families College Bound project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education under Title XI of the Higher Education Act. The college contributes literacy training and other support in a multi-faceted project aimed at breaking the cycle of educational and social failure that often is passed from one generation to the next in undereducated

families. The program targets families in the attendance areas of six public schools in the City of St. Louis. Other participants are Webster University, Harris-Stowe State College, St. Louis Public Schools, the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis, the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department, and the United Way of Greater St. Louis.

• *BFA Program*

A new cooperative program in fine arts is underway with the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Students who enroll as art majors at the college are automatically placed in the associate in fine arts/bachelor of fine arts degree program and assured transfer to the university.

• *National Oak Park Exchange Congress*

This organization chose the college's Florissant Valley campus as the site of its 1994 conference. Begun in 1977 in the Village of Oak Park, a Chicago suburb, the exchange congress is a gathering of persons from diverse racial, religious, economic and ethnic backgrounds who exchange ideas about promoting racial harmony in communities. The conference provided a forum for goals and strategies to achieve diversity and enhance economic development.

• *TEAMS Competition*

More than 200 students from 17 local high schools participate annually in the TEAMS competition at our Florissant Valley campus. The "Tests of Engineering Aptitude, Mathematics and Science" event is held to increase awareness in engineering among high school students and to reinforce the role group strategy plays in solving complex problems.

• *Math Workshop*

Last year we sponsored a two-day mathematics workshop for 150 area math instructors from primary- through university-level institutions with nationally-recognized mathematics educator Uri Treisman. Additionally, our math faculty have been called upon to teach at all levels because of their superior abilities and flexibility. We also have participated in a National Science Foundation-funded program with the University of Missouri and Harris-Stowe State College. Our role is to work at the middle-school level and prepare youngsters for advanced levels.

• *Expanding Horizons in Science and Mathematics*

More than 900 girls in grades eight through ten participate in an annual conference to encourage youngsters to learn more about career opportunities for women in math and science-related

fields. It is sponsored by the Math/Science Network of Greater St. Louis, the college and a number of local businesses and foundations.

• *Serving as a Community Center*

Our centrally-located Forest Park campus is host to more than 100,000 visitors each year who come to campus not for classes, but for a mind-boggling variety of reasons including health fairs, community meetings, public hearings, postal exams, the AIDS quilt exhibit, a presidential visit, Rotary, and hundreds of other events. We encourage the community to use our facilities.

• *Employee Leaves*

It is not just faculty and administrators who have the opportunity to take leave from their regular duties for professional development. Last year, for example, one of our classified employees--a printer--was granted an unpaid leave of absence to serve as a field representative for the St. Louis Teachers' Union Local 420. She was assigned to serve teachers and staff at 34 middle and high schools in the City of St. Louis. She fielded at least 10 calls for help each week, 45 percent of which involved assaults on teachers. In a recent report to the Board of Trustees, she said that one of her major objectives in

this experience was to bring back to college staff members information about the kind of students we will be dealing with in just a few years. Most sadly, she reminded us that in about seven years, we will experience the first large wave of crack babies.

These events and programs are presented to give you just a sketch of what we can do to begin addressing serious societal issues. They are part of the case we must present at the local, state and national levels to expand our resources. Along with Bob McCabe, I am firmly convinced that community colleges are the least expensive and most sensible, productive solution to our nation's most serious problems. It is up to all of us to convince the rest of the country.

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